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SUBJECT: RUSSIA PONDERING NEXT STEPS IN AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Susan M. Elliott for reason
s: 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Embassy Moscow discussed Russia's Afghanistan policy with Vitaly Rugalyov of the MFA Afghan Desk in the Second Asia Department. He indicated that Russia remained committed to building a stable Afghanistan, although much depended on the new government and the U.S. strategy that will be announced soon.

¶2. (C) Rugalyov indicated that Russia was planning to release a joint statement with the U.K. on Afghanistan during Foreign Minister Miliband's visit to Moscow. The statement will express their mutual hope for national reconciliation in Afghanistan and their concern for the current security situation. After a new government is formed, Russia will likely support a British-German proposal for a conference on Afghanistan.

¶3. (C) On the issue of possible infrastructure projects in Afghanistan, Rugalyov stated that Russia was waiting for the formation of the new Afghan government to determine next steps. He again affirmed Russia's interest in participating in infrastructure projects such as the Salang Tunnel and said that many options for cooperation between the U.S. and Russia exist in this area. Rugalyov noted Russia's preference for commercial contracts over Russian funding for such projects. He claimed that it would also be premature to speculate on new projects without knowing the new U.S. strategy for Afghanistan.

¶4. (C) Rugalyov indicated that Russia's Ministry of Interior has concluded a bilateral agreement with the Afghan Ministry of Interior to train 225 police officers in Russian universities in 2010. The police officers will attend one-year programs with the option of studying longer. He speculated that the number of students could be increased if there was sufficient interest on the Afghan side. He noted that a Ministry of Education program offering 80 Afghans scholarships to study in Russia rarely reached the maximum number of students allowed each year.
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